



ASTSWMO, Providing Pathways to Our
Nation's Environmental Stewardship Since 1974

November 29, 2022

Dear ASTSWMO Colleagues and Friends,

Greetings! It's hard to believe that over one year ago I ran for the office of ASTSWMO Vice-President. Today, through the Association's succession process and its active member voting, I humbly and proudly stand in front of you as your 2022-2023 Association President.

Reflecting on the commitments that I made to all Association State and Territorial (State) members, I pledged to wholeheartedly serve and wisely respond to policy shifts that affect our States' rights, to support the continuous alignment of our strategic plan with your training and capacity building needs, and to remain accessible and engaged with the goal of connecting and informing everyone about ASTSWMO. Ultimately, I committed to leaving a legacy of service with a focus on building the next generation of leaders through active member involvement and a culture of diverse, equitable and inclusive Association practices.

Our Association and its members have been center stage throughout many defining moments of the national environmental arena over the past 48 years, and as your President, I want to take a moment to celebrate these.

This year marked the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, a landmark law created in response to the widespread contamination in our nation's waterbodies – exemplified by the many times that the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio caught fire in the late 1960's. This historic Act paved the way for the environmental laws that not only support many of today's federal programs, including CERCLA, Brownfields, Federal Facilities, Hazardous Waste, Materials Management and Tanks, but also inspired the promulgation of State statutes and regulations, some going further to protect and improve public health outcomes and environmental resources nationwide.

This year, we also celebrated the 25th anniversary of America Recycles Day, a campaign that was initiated in the State of Texas and rapidly expanded across many States culminating in a presidential Act honoring national recycling. How far we've come -- from discouraging obsolete waste disposal practices to promoting sustainable materials management across the board. Your body of work and dedication is the reason why we continue to build upon our past successes.

We do not do this work alone. This year, for the first time, our Association members proudly joined forces with the Association of Clean Water Administrators and the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and other partners with the goal of elevating our Association's voice in support of one comprehensive, multifaceted PFAS strategy, bringing together experts from all regulatory programs and seamlessly responding to the urgent public health challenges faced by our cities and towns across the nation.

This year – almost coinciding with Latin American Heritage Month -- you also made it possible for me to serve as the Association's first Latina President. I am delighted to join the ranks of our past President, Conchita Taitano, who proudly served our Association as our first Asian Pacific Islander President. While it is true that we are witnessing a rise in leadership amongst professionals of color and minorities, much more work needs to be done to realize its full potential at a national level – and we are acting on that!

I am proud to serve an Association that, since 1974, has empowered all our members to embrace their ethnicity and cultural essence with confidence, grace and in a safe place to shine. ASTSWMO is the only national association representing all 50 states, 5 territories and the District of Columbia – a “beautiful tapestry of diversity” as our past President Brent Everett declared during his President’s speech in 2021.

When I first became an active member of ASTSWMO in 2001, I never questioned whether my ethnicity could hinder my chances of serving in a leadership role or my ability to become an agent for positive environmental change. This is because, when I joined ASTSWMO, I found that our Association offered a heightened sense of belonging and a home where I knew that I could stand tall and strong, side-by-side with my fellow regulators across the nation and embark on meaningful dialogue aimed at enhancing and elevating environmental protection. I owe much appreciation to our Executive Director Dania Rodriguez and all ASTSWMO staff, our Past-President Tim Ratsep, our Secretary-Treasurer April Webb, our new Vice-President Amy Brittain, and all of our members for helping me promote our Association’s efforts to prepare the next generation of members responsible for our organization’s success.

Without a doubt, the complexity and scope of our collective environmental challenge continue to grow. The rapid global population shifts require a different way to deliver on our services to the communities. Through ASTSWMO, we can be certain that our work, focus and energy will always be directed at the most pressing environmental issues facing our nation, and that our collective knowledge and experience will serve to guide our work and service to protect public health, welfare, safety, and the environment.

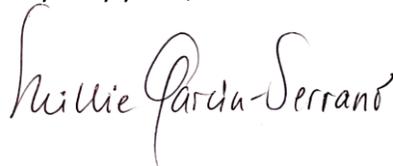
It is my privilege to also honor all the work of past Association Presidents, Board Representatives, Subcommittee and Task Force/Focus Group Chairs, and now retired members that courageously led and kept our stature and reputation in the highest light. I am excited about today and the future days ahead, for the opportunity to work with you, and to continue to evolve as a “President for all”.

While writing this letter I could not help but smile as I looked at pictures of my beloved ASTSWMO colleagues, taken during our ASTSWMO 45th anniversary celebration. As I looked closer, I was amazed by the thought that despite our differences – evidenced by distinct color, culture, gender, and race – what makes us different is what unites us. From Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, to Hawaii, the west coast, the mid-west, the east coast, the south, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands – we all are in it together for the environment and its people. We are all America the Beautiful.

In closing, I extend my most heart-felt expression of gratitude to each and every one of you, for the opportunity of allowing me to continue to unify our voices and deliver on environmental leadership through a more diverse, equitable and inclusive lens.

ASTSWMO will always be here to deliver on our informational needs and program enhancement, but most importantly ASTSWMO will always be the place we call home and the family that we lean on when we are away from home. ¡Viva el ambiente! ¡Viva ASTSWMO!

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Millie Garcia-Serrano". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Millie Garcia-Serrano (MA)
ASTSWMO President, 2022-2023